

**MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting** held at Highfield, The Winnaway, Harwell, on **Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2017** at 7.30pm.

#### **1. ATTENDEES**

Susan Read (Chairman), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Mary Friskney (Guild Steward), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Gill Loyd (Secretary), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Rob Nickless, Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard, Roy Thorpe, Colin Turner, Nicola Turner

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Ian Minns (Newsletter Editor), Mark Cooke (Web Master), Nick Clarke, Cliff Garlick, Jill Garlick, Debbie Greenfield, Jenny Jeskins, Carina Lobley, Claire Ward

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

Circulated and read, and one amendment made to details of the Brightwell bell restoration project. The Chairman then signed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

- **Branch Practices:** Colin Turner pointed out that attendance at the branch practices he has recently attended was very poor. The Branch has over 260 members and yet only three members, in addition to the locals, went to the practice at Marcham. The Milton ringers are the only ones in the branch to have cancelled their own practice so that they could attend a branch practice on the same evening. Colin questioned the validity of continuing to hold monthly branch practices in the evenings, suggesting that we should consider other possibilities (e.g. only going to towers that have several ringers of their own, not going to towers with 'difficult' rings of bells, only holding practices on a regular night in alternate months, or not holding any evening practices).  
The Joint Ringing Masters said that some evening branch practices during the year had been very well attended. It was their shared opinion that even two additional ringers can often make a big difference on a practice night and so they would be reluctant to discontinue these practices.  
The Guild Steward offered to find out what happens in the Newbury and Sonning Deanery branches.  
**Decision:** Whether or not evening branch practices should be continued (and, if so, in what form) will be discussed at the AGM, and members asked for their opinions.
- **New Year's Ringing and Refreshments at St. Helen Abingdon:** This was very successful and £175 was donated to St. Nicolas, Abingdon, towards the cost of the new rope bosses.
- **Branch 6-bell striking completion trophy:** The Abingdon ringers were very pleased to belatedly receive an attractive new trophy for winning the 2016 competition.

#### **5. SECRETARY'S REPORT**

- Since the last Committee Meeting, monthly branch practices have been held at Wantage, Marcham and Brightwell. Mid-week afternoon ringing practices have been held at Cholsey, Chilton, Drayton and North Moreton. Before the January practice at North Moreton, twenty-five learners and helpers enjoyed lunch at a pre-practice social in The Bear. Surprise major practices were held in Sutton Courtenay and Milton.
- Susan Read organised events for young branch members: a visit to the falconry centre at Millets Farm with ringing at Marcham in October; skittles and ringing at Radley in December; a treasure hunt, magic show and ringing at Brightwell in February.
- Since the last Committee Meeting we have gained only one new member (Jo O'Reilly from Wallingford). Ellen Bramhill of Blewbury was re-elected to the Guild. Ellen was taught at Wantage by Peter Davies and has recently returned to ringing after a 25 year break.
- Unfortunately the branch was not represented at the Guild's 6-bell striking competition because the Abingdon ringers were not able to raise a band. Richard Loyd has had a trophy made for the winners of our 6-bell competition to hold for a year, and this has been belatedly presented to Abingdon for winning the 2016 competition. The trophy is a model of a bell wheel and clapper in brass, mounted on oak.
- The branch band entering the Guild's 10-bell striking competition in Banbury was placed equal third with EBSB Branch, only one percent behind the Newbury ringers who came second.

- The quiz and supper evening at Brightwell on Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> November, was very well attended by fifty-two branch members, their families and friends. Thanks go to Roy Thorpe, the Brightwell ringers and the quiz master, Robert, for their magnificent organisation of the evening, which started with ringing on the newly rehung bells. Nine teams entered the quiz and Blewbury were the winners. The event raised £410 for branch funds.
- New Year's Day 2017 ringing with refreshments was held at Abingdon, St Helen and over forty people attended. Thanks go to Susan Read and all the Abingdon ringers for the excellent refreshments, from interesting and tasty soups through to delicious cakes. This was once again a very happy occasion for the Branch and a good start to 2017.

## **6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT**

- The numerous and varied branch practices are often well or very well attended and cater for ringers at all skill levels. The regular monthly practices give beginners and advancing learners the chance to ring with the added strength from experienced branch members, and can introduce new ringers to others from different towers, giving the opportunity to share learning experiences.
- Recently the number of branch members attending evening practices has dramatically declined. The reasons for this are unclear but it is a trend that we need to reverse in order to maintain their future. Conversely, the monthly afternoon practices are extremely well attended by ringers at all levels, and are a good means for advancement at the intermediate level. The Surprise Major practices are also going well with good attendance by members from within ONB and also neighbouring branches.
- Although there are many practices to attend, having 'joint' Ringing Masters shares the workload. We are very grateful for the help of experienced 'volunteers' who have kindly stepped into our shoes on the few occasions neither of us could attend.
- Despite this picture the branch does have its challenges. Many of our bells have had major overhauls, which have really helped ringing and teaching at these towers. However, some of our bells are difficult to ring, which adds to the problem of recruiting locally. Hopefully the branch will continue its excellent work to support new restoration projects to increase the potential for more recruitment in the future.
- The age profile of branch members is increasing year by year, although this is now somewhat balanced by the brilliant efforts by Susan and several others in recruiting young ringers in recent years. However there is a shortage of people with sufficient youth and energy, combined with suitable leadership experience, to become our future Tower Captains or Branch Officers. Some experienced ringers have moved to our area recently, and we know of several lapsed ringers who have returned to ringing after many years and are making a real difference at their towers. Let's hope this trend continues so as to introduce some new faces to the leadership roles.

## **7. TRAINING COORDINATOR'S REPORT**

The post of Training Coordinator remains vacant. Susan Read discussed the training course she is planning:

### **Branch intensive ringing course May – July 2017**

- A six week course costing £20 per trainee; held on three nights per week in twelve different towers in the Wallingford area, for a maximum of ten new learners with six teachers, to commence at North Moreton.
- The course will take place on tower practice nights, meeting before the start of the practice.
- Prior to the course, taster sessions will be held at Blewbury and Harwell (a look at the bells, a brief lesson on backstrokes, meet the ringers and have refreshments).
- There will be an end of course party, possibly a 'bring and share' supper in North Moreton Village Hall.
- Jenny Jeskins will book and coordinate the towers. Susan needs help with coordinating teachers and trainees, advertising (leaflets, parish magazines, branch website, etc.) and preparing course literature.

The pilot course held in autumn 2016 had been successful. Of the trainees, two are still ringing and two are planning to return to ringing after recovery from an injury.

## **8. TREASURER'S REPORT**

- In 2016 the membership of the Branch was 264 (4 more than in 2015). 255 members paid subscriptions, 5 of whom were members of the Guild through other branches. In addition there were 7 Honorary and 2 Life members.

- So far in 2017 we have 117 paid up members (from 12 towers and 3 unattached), together with the 7 Honorary and 2 Life members, plus 4 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 15 towers have not paid their subscriptions to date. Branch subscriptions must be paid over to the Guild before the end of March to ensure members benefit from the Guild Insurance policy.
- The main fund raising event in 2016 was the Quiz evening at Brightwell, which raised £410. The New Year's ringing at Blewbury raised £66, the BBQ proceeds were £195 and the BBQ raffle raised £80. There were no active restoration projects in the branch so these proceeds have been retained, unlike in earlier years when they were donated to a specific project.
- For the first time, the Branch collected a voluntary £2 donation with the annual subscriptions. Almost everyone made the contribution to put towards restoration projects. Again this has been retained awaiting a suitable project.
- Five youth events were organised by the Branch, resulting in a small surplus.
- Donations were made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (£250) and the Oxford Diocesan Guild Restoration Fund (£100).
- At the end of 2016, the Branch had funds in the region of £3,530, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch. Suitable restoration projects needed!
- The accounts for 2016 have been examined and circulated ready to be presented for approval at the AGM.

#### 9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

- **Abingdon, St Nicolas:** All the work has now been completed.
- Currently there are no branch restoration projects. The Vicar of Sparsholt had expressed an interest in restoring and possibly augmenting the four bells, but no decisions have yet been made.

#### 10. DONATIONS FROM BRANCH FUNDS AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS

- **ODG Funds:** The Committee will recommend to the AGM that £250 be donated to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and £100 to the ODG Restoration Fund.
- **Abingdon St Nicolas:** The Committee will recommend to the AGM that the £200 grant discussed by the Committee at the October 2016 meeting be ratified.
- At the AGM, the Committee will request the permission of the membership to be allowed to offer discretionary grants to towers for restoration and maintenance of up to a maximum of £500 during the year, rather than having to wait for the next AGM or calling an EGM.

#### 11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

There is one additional item for the agenda for the AGM: Branch practices.

#### 12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- Mini outing with three towers and lunch in the Checkendon area on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> April.
- Branch outing to South Swindon area and evening barbecue on Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July.
- Barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall on Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> November. The cost of the hall is £120, with a deposit of £200, and the cost of the band is £450. To avoid cancellation, the Secretary will send out invitations to ONBB members in September and, depending upon the response, will extend invitations to the VoWH, South Oxon and Oxford City branches.

#### 13. GUILD MASTER'S DISCUSSION ITEM FOR ODG MARCH COMMITTEE MEETING

The Secretary will give the following feedback at the ODG March General Committee Meeting on the Guild Master's discussion item: the relevance of the Guild Festival, held every five years in Oxford.

- The Branch Committee felt that the Festival is still relevant and has a place in Guild events.
- Who the Guild Festival is for is not made very clear in the publicity material. Our less experienced members feel that ringing is 'pyramid-shaped', with most ringers at the bottom of the pyramid, the more experienced in the middle and the most competent at the top. They think that ringing in Oxford (especially at the Cathedral) is for ringers at or near the top of the pyramid, and so they feel prevented from going because they would be out of their depth. Future publicity needs to be very clear that all

levels of competence are welcomed, and that there is something at the Festival for everybody. The Committee thought the personalised invitation from the Guild Master ten years ago was a good idea.

- Some long-standing branch members have been to Guild Festivals in the past and now feel no reason to repeat the experience. Perhaps they should be encouraged to attend and to bring along members of their towers who have never been before (i.e. those members at the bottom of the 'pyramid', who might feel intimidated).
- The 2016 Festival itself seemed to be disjointed, with little flow. There was a big gap in the middle of the day for attendees to 'do their own thing'. This would be better filled with a lunch to give everyone the opportunity to socialise. This could be in the style of a traditional ringers' tea in a hall (it was thought that a previous festival used a hall on Aldgate), or there could be a picnic lunch in Christchurch Meadows. This would help to keep everyone together and make the day feel less divided into two halves.

#### 14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Milton church is closed for four months for repair to the floor and the installation of kitchen and toilet facilities. There will be no Sunday service ringing or visiting bands allowed during this period. Practice nights will continue and attendees should use the entrance door at the foot of the tower.
- The Branch Web Master had sent a report detailing the number of visitors to the branch website. He wanted to know how useful the website was and what would members like to see there. The Committee felt:
  - The number of visitors to the site was quite good.
  - The current situation at Milton needs to be added to the news.
  - There should be a page devoted to the intensive ringing course, possibly allowing enrolment via the website.
  - The branch calendar could be expanded to show more information (weight of bells, special methods, etc.).
  - There should be a means to email officers via the website, possibly a link from the officers' photographs.
  - Web pages should be given additional shortened titles so that hand typing a URL from a poster is made easier (e.g. one poster that says go to [onb.odg.org.uk/live/index.html](http://onb.odg.org.uk/live/index.html) could say ONBhomepage or something to that effect, which would direct to the correct web page and help to avoid typing mistakes when searching for the page).
- The judges for the Branch 6-bell striking competition on 18<sup>th</sup> March are Jon and Kay Chamberlain of Faringdon.
- Susan Read offered to put herself forward as Training Officer at the 2017 AGM. Rob Nickless and Dick Peters indicated that they would be willing to be nominated as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively. There will be a request for any other nominations at the meeting.

#### 15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 at 7.30pm, at Dornie Lodge, Bessels Lea, Blewbury.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to Janette and Philip for their hospitality, the meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Signed..... Date.....